



# Indonesia's Maritime Security Challenges and Implications of The Marine Corps Modernization

**Yalesesa Milwa Suga**

Naval Command College, PLA Navy China

E-mail: [yalesdini@gmail.com](mailto:yalesdini@gmail.com)

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## ABSTRACT

Indonesia's vast maritime domain faces a growing array of traditional and non-traditional security threats, necessitating a strategic transformation of its maritime defense posture. This study examines the challenges confronting Indonesia's maritime security and analyzes the implications of Marine Corps modernization through the lens of Clausewitz's Ends-Ways-Means framework. Using a qualitative, literature-based method, the research explores the alignment between Indonesia's national security objectives (ends), the strategic approaches employed (ways), and the resources available to support them (means). Findings reveal a clear strategic intent to enhance deterrence and regional maritime leadership; however, capability gaps and resource limitations present significant obstacles. The study concludes that successful modernization requires not only equipment upgrades, but also doctrinal reform, joint integration, and sustained investment to ensure operational readiness and strategic coherence in the Indo-Pacific maritime theater.

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## **Corresponding Author:**

Nama penulis: **Yalesesa Milwa Suga**

Naval Command College, PLA Navy China

E-mail: [yalesdini@gmail.com](mailto:yalesdini@gmail.com)

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## Introductions

Indonesia, the world's largest archipelagic state, possesses over 17,000 islands and a strategic location at the crossroads of major global sea lanes. This geographical reality makes maritime security not only a cornerstone of national defense but also a vital element in sustaining economic stability, sovereignty, and regional influence. As global competition intensifies in the Indo-Pacific region, the challenges to Indonesia's maritime domain from piracy and illegal fishing to gray-zone conflicts and transnational crime have grown in complexity and urgency.

The country's vast maritime expanse is vulnerable to numerous threats that stretch the capacity of its naval and maritime enforcement agencies. Traditional challenges such as



territorial disputes in the South China Sea, as well as non-traditional ones like environmental degradation and illicit trafficking, demand a versatile and responsive security apparatus. The Indonesian Navy (TNI AL), particularly the Marine Corps (Korps Marinir), plays a central role in addressing these multifaceted threats. However, the current force structure and capability levels of the Marine Corps face limitations in projecting power across distant and dispersed island territories.

In response, Indonesia has embarked on a strategic modernization of its Marine Corps. This includes the procurement of advanced amphibious vehicles, increased joint training with foreign partners, and enhancement of expeditionary warfare capabilities. The modernization aims to transform the Marine Corps into a more agile, lethal, and interoperable force capable of executing amphibious operations, rapid response, and island defense missions in high-risk areas such as Natuna, the Malacca Strait, and eastern archipelagic waters.

These modernization efforts carry significant implications. On one hand, they enhance Indonesia's deterrence posture and its ability to secure vital maritime chokepoints and exclusive economic zones (EEZ). On the other, they reflect a shift in strategic priorities toward integrated maritime defense and regional stability, aligning with broader national doctrines such as the Global Maritime Fulcrum. The modernization also strengthens Indonesia's credibility in multilateral maritime cooperation, contributing to ASEAN's collective security framework.

In conclusion, as Indonesia navigates an increasingly contested maritime environment, the challenges it faces require not only vigilant surveillance and enforcement but also a modern, capable Marine Corps. The ongoing modernization is both a response to immediate threats and a long-term investment in national resilience. It signals a maturing strategic vision one that recognizes the sea not merely as a boundary, but as a dynamic space for defense, diplomacy, and national identity.

This study employs strategic analysis using the Ends-Ways-Means model, which originates from the classical theory of war by Carl von Clausewitz. The Ends-Ways-Means framework, rooted in the strategic thought of Carl von Clausewitz, provides a structured approach to understanding and formulating military strategy. In this model, **"Ends"** refer to the desired objectives or political goals a nation seeks to achieve, such as territorial integrity or regional stability. **"Ways"** are the methods or courses of action employed to accomplish those objectives, including military operations, diplomacy, or joint force deployment. **"Means"** encompass the resources available to execute the strategy such as personnel, equipment, funding, and infrastructure. Clausewitz emphasized that a successful strategy requires a coherent alignment between these three elements; any imbalance such as ambitious ends with limited means or unclear ways can lead to strategic failure.

## **Problematics**



Indonesia's maritime security landscape is increasingly marked by a complex mix of traditional and non-traditional threats, exposing a critical gap between the challenges faced and the capacity of existing maritime defense forces. As an archipelagic nation with sprawling sea territory, Indonesia struggles with persistent issues such as territorial violations, illegal fishing, smuggling, and potential military incursions many of which occur in remote or strategically vital waters. Despite the Indonesian Marine Corps' central role in maritime defense, its current force structure, mobility, and logistical capabilities remain insufficient to respond swiftly and effectively across dispersed islands. This disconnect underscores an urgent need for modernization, not just in terms of equipment but also strategic doctrine and integration with broader national defense goals. Without a decisive transformation, Indonesia risks falling behind in safeguarding its sovereignty and securing its maritime domain in an increasingly contested Indo-Pacific region.

## **Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative method through a literature-based approach, focusing on the Ends-Ways-Means framework derived from Clausewitz's classical theory of war. By analyzing scholarly literature, defense documents, and strategic publications, the research interprets the alignment between Indonesia's maritime security objectives (ends), the strategic approaches taken through Marine Corps modernization (ways), and the available resources and capabilities (means). This method allows for an in-depth understanding of how effectively Indonesia's current defense strategy addresses its maritime challenges within a coherent strategic framework.

## **Results and Discussions**

### **Results**

This research explores the intersection between maritime security threats and the strategic response formulated through the modernization of the Indonesian Marine Corps. Guided by Clausewitz's Ends-Ways-Means framework, the analysis investigates the alignment between national security goals, the methods employed to achieve them, and the resources available to support these efforts. The following sections outline the key findings of the study, highlighting the nature of current threats, institutional limitations, strategic objectives, implications of modernization, and the challenges that must be addressed to ensure operational readiness and maritime sovereignty.

#### **1. Escalating Maritime Threats in Indonesia's Strategic Waters.**

The analysis reveals that Indonesia's maritime domain is increasingly exposed to both traditional and non-traditional security threats. Traditional threats include the potential for foreign encroachment, particularly in the North Natuna Sea where China's nine-dash line overlaps with Indonesia's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Non-traditional threats such as illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, piracy, maritime smuggling, and environmental degradation continue to strain the capacities of maritime law enforcement. The growing strategic interest of global powers in the Indo-Pacific has further intensified



the vulnerability of Indonesia's maritime chokepoints like the Malacca Strait and the ALKI (Indonesian Archipelagic Sea Lanes).

## **2. Limitations in the Current Force Posture of the Marine Corps.**

The Indonesian Marine Corps, while positioned as a key amphibious and rapid reaction force, currently lacks sufficient logistical reach, modern equipment, and integrated joint operational capability. The analysis identifies that the Marine Corps' existing amphibious vehicles, sea-lift assets, and communications systems are outdated and limited in supporting extended deployments across dispersed island groups. In addition, the ability to sustain operations in frontier regions such as Natuna, Saumlaki, or the eastern archipelagos remains a challenge, often constrained by infrastructure and support facilities.

## **3. Strategic Drivers and Objectives of Modernization.**

Indonesia's Marine Corps modernization is driven by the necessity to enhance deterrence, enable force projection, and ensure rapid response to emerging maritime threats. The modernization efforts include the acquisition of amphibious assault vehicles, development of expeditionary units, and increased participation in joint and combined exercises with international partners. These efforts aim to transform the Marine Corps into a flexible, mobile, and interoperable force capable of defending remote islands and supporting maritime security operations within a joint operational framework. The modernization also reflects Indonesia's aspiration to strengthen its influence in regional security affairs, particularly under the vision of the Global Maritime Fulcrum (*Poros Maritim Dunia*).

## **4. Implications for National and Regional Maritime Security.**

The modernization of the Marine Corps is not only a tactical necessity but a strategic signal. At the national level, it enhances the capability of the Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI) to respond to security incidents in remote waters and protect vital sea lines of communication (SLOCs). Regionally, it contributes to Indonesia's credibility as a maritime security provider, enabling more meaningful participation in ASEAN-led security mechanisms and regional patrols. However, the analysis also points out that modernization alone is insufficient without doctrinal reform, improved command-and-control systems, and stronger integration with naval and air forces.

## **5. Challenges and Limitations of Modernization Efforts.**

Despite strategic intent, the implementation of modernization programs faces several challenges. Budgetary constraints, technological dependency on foreign suppliers, and bureaucratic inefficiencies may hinder the timely development of Marine Corps capabilities. Moreover, human resource development and institutional adaptation are needed to ensure that modernization translates into real operational effectiveness. The Marine Corps must also adapt its doctrine and training to align with modern joint warfare concepts and multidomain threats, including cyber and electronic warfare dimensions.

## **Discussions**



This research applies Carl von Clausewitz's classical Ends-Ways-Means framework to critically analyze Indonesia's strategic response to its growing maritime security challenges, particularly through the modernization of the Marine Corps. Clausewitz posited that a sound strategy requires a rational alignment between the ends (political or strategic objectives), the ways (methods or approaches to achieve those ends), and the means (resources available to execute the methods). In the Indonesian case, this triadic model offers valuable insight into how the country is attempting to transform its maritime defense posture amid a volatile regional security environment.

### **1. Ends: Strategic Objectives in a Shifting Maritime Environment**

Indonesia's overarching strategic ends are rooted in the preservation of national sovereignty, the protection of its vast maritime borders, and the assurance of maritime security across its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). These objectives are particularly urgent in areas like the North Natuna Sea, where overlapping claims with China raise the risk of confrontation, and in critical chokepoints such as the Malacca Strait and ALKI sea lanes, which are vulnerable to piracy, smuggling, and great-power competition. Additionally, Indonesia seeks to maintain regional influence and project itself as a leading maritime actor in ASEAN through the Global Maritime Fulcrum doctrine. The intensification of both traditional threats (e.g., territorial encroachments, state-based aggression) and non-traditional threats (e.g., IUU fishing, trafficking, environmental crime) has elevated the importance of achieving these ends.

### **2. Ways: Modernization as a Strategic Course of Action**

To pursue these objectives, Indonesia has adopted several strategic ways, with the modernization of the Marine Corps as a primary method. This includes acquiring amphibious assault vehicles, developing expeditionary units, and enhancing joint operational capability with both domestic and international military forces. Through increased training exercises, interoperability, and readiness for rapid deployment, Indonesia aims to shape the Marine Corps into a flexible, mobile, and deterrent force capable of protecting remote islands and responding swiftly to maritime threats. These methods are designed not only to address operational weaknesses but also to support broader strategic ambitions, including leadership in regional maritime security dialogues and multilateral initiatives.

### **3. Means: Resource Limitations and Capability Gaps**

Despite the clarity of Indonesia's ends and the relevance of its strategic ways, the means available namely, defense budgets, military infrastructure, and technological capacity are still insufficient to support the full realization of the modernization agenda. The research findings show that the Marine Corps continues to struggle with outdated platforms, limited sea-lift capability, and inadequate logistics to maintain extended operations in remote and contested areas like Saumlaki and Natuna. Moreover, institutional weaknesses, including fragmented doctrine, limited integration with naval and air forces, and a shortage of trained personnel, further constrain effectiveness. Clausewitz would interpret this imbalance as a critical



vulnerability: if the means are not proportional to the ends or if they cannot adequately support the chosen ways, the strategy risks being either ineffective or unsustainable.

#### **4. Strategic Implications and Regional Signaling**

The modernization of the Marine Corps, although constrained, sends a significant strategic signal to both domestic and international audiences. Domestically, it reflects a commitment to defending national interests and protecting the maritime economy. Internationally, it projects Indonesia's willingness to act as a maritime security provider and increases its credibility in cooperative efforts such as ASEAN maritime patrols and Indo-Pacific security frameworks. However, Clausewitz would caution that strategic signaling must be backed by tangible capabilities. Without sufficient means to project power and sustain operations, Indonesia's efforts could be perceived as symbolic rather than substantive, which may undermine deterrence and credibility.

#### **5. Bridging the Gaps: Aligning Ends, Ways, and Means**

Ultimately, the success of Indonesia's maritime strategy depends on its ability to align the ends, ways, and means in a coherent and realistic manner. The current imbalance where the ends are ambitious and the ways are conceptually sound, but the means are still underdeveloped creates strategic friction. To bridge this gap, Indonesia must prioritize:

- a) Increased defense investment, especially in naval and amphibious logistics;
- b) Accelerated doctrinal reform to support integrated joint operations;
- c) Human resource development within the Marine Corps;
- d) Improved C4ISR capabilities to enhance situational awareness and decision-making;
- e) And greater institutional coordination across TNI services and government agencies.

By addressing these structural and capability-related challenges, Indonesia can gradually move toward a Clausewitzian balance, where its national objectives are supported by actionable strategies and adequate resources. Only then can the modernization of the Marine Corps evolve from a political ambition into an effective and enduring instrument of maritime defense and regional stability.

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **1. Strategic Necessity for Marine Corps Modernization**

Indonesia's increasingly complex maritime security environment characterized by both traditional threats like territorial encroachment and non-traditional challenges such as IUU fishing and smuggling necessitates a responsive and versatile amphibious force. The modernization of the Marine Corps is not merely a tactical improvement, but a strategic imperative to secure national interests, particularly in vulnerable and remote maritime zones such as the North Natuna Sea and key ALKI routes. This transformation





directly supports Indonesia's strategic ends of safeguarding sovereignty, ensuring regional stability, and reinforcing its role in the Indo-Pacific maritime order.

2. Clausewitzian Imbalance Between Ambition and Capacity

Using Clausewitz's Ends-Ways-Means framework, this study identifies a critical imbalance in Indonesia's maritime defense strategy. While the ends are ambitious and the ways including modernization and joint force development are strategically sound, the means remain insufficient. Limitations in logistics, equipment, infrastructure, and institutional integration hinder the Marine Corps' ability to fulfill its operational role effectively. Without addressing these gaps, Indonesia's modernization efforts risk being aspirational rather than transformative, potentially undermining deterrence and strategic credibility.

3. Toward a Coherent and Sustainable Maritime Defense Posture

For the modernization of the Marine Corps to be successful and sustainable, it must be part of a broader, integrated national defense strategy. This includes increasing defense investments, reforming joint operational doctrine, improving C4ISR systems, and enhancing interoperability within the TNI and with external partners. Only through the balanced alignment of ends, ways, and means as Clausewitz envisioned can Indonesia develop a resilient maritime force capable of addressing evolving threats and asserting its maritime identity as a leading archipelagic power.

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